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ABC NEWS

SHOW: NIGHTLINE

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HEADLINE: The JFK Assassination Files

BODY:

TED KOPPEL: [voice-over] Was it really Lee Harvey Oswald who killed JFK? Or was it the Mob, Castro or even the CIA? Some believe the answer may be hidden in files on the assassination, files that have been sealed for nearly three decades. Now there's a real chance those records will be made public. But will they prove once and for all whether there was a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy?

ANNOUNCER: This is ABC News Nightline, a special edition. Reporting from Washington, Ted Koppel.

KOPPEL: If I were to say on this broadcast tonight that the assassination of President Kennedy was the product of a conspiracy involving officers of the CIA, the FBI, high-ranking members of the Pentagon and former vice president Lyndon Baines Johnson, you would have every right to say, "Prove it. Substantiate it. Document it. Or at the very least, quote your sources." There are, in other words, certain ground rules that even journalists are expected to observe. Indeed, if Oliver Stone, the film-maker, had produced a documentary rather than a feature film, he would have been expected to observe a similar discipline. Instead he produced a film in which he simply made up what he couldn't prove or substantiate. In film-making, that is called "artistic license." In statecraft it's called "propaganda." Either way, it carries a lot of impact. Here's Nightline correspondent Forrest Sawyer.

KEVIN COSTNER: ["JFK"] [as Jim Garrison] John F. Kennedy's murder was probably one of the most terrible moments in this history of our country!

FORREST SAWYER, ABC News: [voice-over] Oliver Stone's JFK has quickly become the most hotly debated and harshly criticized Hollywood film ever made. Costing over \$40 million, running over three hours, it is a broadside attack against the Warren Commission's official conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone to assassinate President Kennedy.

DONALD SUTHERLAND: ["JFK"] [as Colonel X] Why was Kennedy killed? Who benefited? Who has the power to cover it up?

SAWYER: [voice-over] The film mixes fact and fiction, what Stone calls "artistic license," to argue that Kennedy was killed by conspirators who included government officials, that Lee Harvey Oswald could have been an intelligence agent who tried to stop the assassination, that a cover-up involving the highest government officials is still going on.

OLIVER STONE, Director, "JFK": There is a covert, shadow-type government that seems to be running this country. It seems to dictate what we must hear and see and tries to tell us what our history is.

SAWYER: [voice-over] Critics, including other conspiracy theorists, have loudly called the film "irresponsible propaganda," "not to be believed." But Stone has fought back with a whirlwind media campaign, appearing everywhere, always arguing one key point. [interviewing] [Nightline, December 19, 1991] What would you like to have come out of this?

Mr. STONE: If these critics feel so secure with their truth, why don't we- why don't the- why don't we let the American public see it? Let the files out.

SAWYER: [voice-over] Sealed government files, documents on the Kennedy assassination kept out of public view for many years, material that Stone's film suggests could provide answers to who killed Kennedy.

Mr. COSTNER: ["JFK"] But because the government considers you children who might be too disturbed or distressed to face this reality, or because you might possibly lynch those involved, you cannot see these documents for another 75 years.

SAWYER: [voice-over] Flawed or not, Stone's assault is breaking down decades-old barriers of silence, with a new Gallup poll showing 73 percent of Americans believe there was a conspiracy to kill Kennedy.

ACTOR: ["JFK"] The guy couldn't do the shooting. Nobody could.

SAWYER: [voice-over] More and more influential people are joining the call to release the documents.

REPORTER: [WGMC] Do you believe that there should be more items declassified?

Sen. EDWARD KENNEDY (D-MA): I- we're for all of the- any items that are out of our control, clearly, and other items, they obviously ought to be made available.

SAWYER: [voice-over] First target: the 1977 House Assassinations Committee. Here in the National Archives, where these already-released Warren Commission materials are stored, the committee placed 848 boxes of documents, sealed by law until the year 2029. The House documents are said to contain personnel files, informant files, general investigative material. Will they provide any real answers to what happened on November 22, 1963? Chief counsel for the committee, Robert Blakey.

ROBERT BLAKEY, Chief Counsel, Assassinations Committee: I have seen everything in our files. My initials are on them. And if you think that there's the proof of who killed John Kennedy in those files, I have to tell you you're on illicit substances. In a word, you're stoned.

SAWYER: [voice-over] Critics say, at the least the American people will be able to judge how well the committee conducted its investigation.

HAROLD WEISBERG, Assassination Researcher: They were a bunch of nincompoops. They wouldn't have known any new evidence if it slapped them in the face.

SAWYER: [voice-over] Congressman Louis Stokes was chairman of the House select committee and now says Americans should decide for themselves. He plans to introduce a joint House-Senate resolution calling for the release of a lot more than the House committee's files.

Rep. LOUIS STOKES (D-OH): All of the sealed files having any bearing whatsoever upon the assassination of the President would be incorporated in the type of a resolution that I'm currently trying to draft.

SAWYER: [voice-over] Possible CIA files on a mysterious visit Lee Harvey Oswald made to Mexico; suspected FBI wiretaps that may link former teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa with mobsters Santos Traficante [sp?] and Carlos Marcello [sp?] in a plan to kill the President. The House committee ran out of time and money before it could pursue some of those leads.

Mr. BLAKEY: The places to look are in the files we didn't fully examine dealing with Carlos Marcello, Santos Traficante, their associates, and the likelihood that elements of organized crime had a hand in the President's death.

SAWYER: [voice-over] The CIA has given a statement to ABC News, saying "In 1978 the House select committee was given complete access to all CIA material that was relevant, specifically that dealing with agency involvement. We gave them what they asked for." But committee investigators say the agency dragged its feet then and may still hold back critical information.

EDWIN LOPEZ, Former House Committee Investigator: There was complete- a complete lack of cooperation from the agency from the beginning to the end. The bottom line was that they didn't want us to find out who killed Kennedy, for whatever reason. What they wanted us to do was to give them a nice packaged report with a bow on it that said we substantiated the Warren Commission's findings.

SAWYER: This new drive to release the files was born out of Oliver Stone's belief that the government has been lying for 28 years. And critics are already saying that the most important material may never see the light of day, which means that even if all but the most sensitive documents are released soon, there will likely be more questions raised than answered and America's suspicions will stay firmly locked in place. Forrest Sawyer for Nightline in New York.

KOPPEL: When we come back we'll talk with Congressman Louis Stokes, who was the chairman of the House committee that concluded in 1979 there probably was a conspiracy to kill JFK. It was Congressman Stokes who ordered that committee's files be sealed until the year 2029. We'll also talk with the former counsel to the Warren Commission who says releasing the files will put to rest all of the conspiracy theories and with a former BBC journalist who over the past 15 years has interviewed hundreds of witnesses and sources on the assassination.

[Commercial break]

KOPPEL: Joining us from our Washington studio is Congressman Louis Stokes of Ohio, who was the chairman of the House committee that investigated the JFK assassination. Congressman Stokes announced today he will seek to have all files relating to the assassination opened. From our Chicago bureau, attorney David Belin, who was counsel to the Warren Commission and is author of two books on the assassination. And from our London bureau, journalist Anthony Summers, the

author of Conspiracy, the definitive book on the JFK assassination. Why, Congressman Stokes, now? Just because of the Stone movie?

Rep. LOUIS STOKES (D-OH): I think that the Stone movie has stirred up the controversy around the sealed files sufficiently that those who have been urging release of those files over a number of years have now joined in and Americans all over the country are now writing and requesting that these other files be released.

KOPPEL: All right. Let us be more specific about what files are really under consideration here. You're talking about all the files that were available to your committee when it was making its investigation. But are you also talking about other files that may still be in the hands of the FBI and the CIA, but were not released to you at the time?

Rep. STOKES: It's my notion that just a release of the files which our committee has sealed will not make the critics go away and say that they've had an opportunity to see everything and to know positively that there was no cover-up. I think that the Church committee files, which were sealed by the United States Senate, which investigated organized crime, should be released. I think the FBI files, the CIA files, I think even court files. Wherever there were files dealing with the assassination of the President that are now sealed, I think all of them should be put in the public domain.

KOPPEL: And is it your feeling that both the House and the Senate will go along with your recommendation?

Rep. STOKES: I have every indication that there are members of the Senate, as well as the House, who feel as I do that the time has arrived when we ought to just release everything that is releasable to the American public.

KOPPEL: Now, Mr. Belin, is it- is it your feeling that if indeed all of this comes to pass and all of these files are released, that indeed that will put a closure to, if not all the conspiracy theories, at least most of them?

DAVID BELIN, Former Counsel to Warren Commission: I am the only person in the world, Mr. Koppel, that has had access to all of the Warren Commission files and has had access to all of the CIA files because I headed the investigation of the CIA in 1975 and extracted from them their confessions that they were engaged in assassination plots against foreign leaders. In 1975 I called for a public release of all Warren Commission files, all CIA files. I filed Freedom of Information Act requests in 1975. I can tell you that none of these files in any way change the absolute veracity of the conclusion of the Warren Commission that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman who killed President Kennedy and Officer Tippett on that tragic afternoon and that Jack Ruby was not conspiratorially involved. Now, what happens is that all the evidence that's actually available to determine those answers to those questions is available, but people ignore the evidence, such as Mr. Summers in his book, where he ignores the six eyewitnesses to the Tippett murder shooting. But what I do believe is that the people are entitled to know and what I want the world to know is since 1975, I have been trying to get these released. And I had the unique experience of knowing how little the CIA released because I had seen everything they had in the files before I filed the Freedom of Information Act requests.

KOPPEL: Before I turn to Mr. Summers, let me ask you, Mr. Belin, why it is you

think that Congressman Stokes and investigators and members of his committee who saw, presumably, the same files that you did came to the conclusion that indeed there was a conspiracy?

Mr. BELIN: Because they had erroneous acoustical evidence that there was supposedly a Dallas audiotape from a stuck microphone that scientists testifying before the committee asserted that this showed a fourth shot. You couldn't see it, but you could see waves on an oscillating scope and they wanted further investigation, which indeed was made by the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, chaired by Professor Ramsey [sp?], Norman Ramsey of the Harvard physics department and including professors from Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Columbia, people from IBM and Bell. They found out that not only was there no validity to the scientific claims that gave the majority of the House committee the position or the finding that there was a fourth gun- fourth shot fired, but they also found the point in the tape occurred more than a minute after the assassination. Now, what has happened, to be honest with you, Mr. Koppel, is that the world doesn't know this because conspiracy claims get on the front pages and the truth seems to get relegated to two inches on page 33 or doesn't get any coverage on TV. But what I can tell you is that in my second book- and by the way, the royalties from both of my books went to charity. In my second book I told the story of what happened and the fact that the chief counsel of the committee, Blakey, Professor Blakey, had said that if the tests which were subsequently done by the National Research Council Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, if they didn't prove with a 95 percent degree of accuracy, was his words, that there was a fourth shot, then he would withdraw everything he said. Well, it proved that there was no basis of claiming a fourth shot. Someone ought to talk to Professor Ramsey at Harvard and he would tell you what the truth is.

KOPPEL: All right. Let me just- let me go back once again. And Mr. Summers, I appreciate your patience. Hold on. We'll come back to you after the break, but I just want to- I just want to close this particular issue. Is that indeed, Congressman Stokes, the only piece of evidence on which your committee based its conclusion that there was reason to believe that there had been a conspiracy?

Rep. STOKES: No, it certainly is not. And one of the things that Mr. Belin is not saying is that the Warren Commission never pursued an investigation with reference to a conspiracy. They started out with the conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin and pursued it strictly from that perspective. Our committee did pursue a theory that there may have been a conspiracy and therefore we pursued an investigation towards whether or not we could come out to that end. We also found that some of the information that was not given to the Warren Commission was part of what did lead us to our conclusion. That is, the CIA did not give them certain information, withheld certain information from them, and so they could not have pursued a conspiracy investigation. So those are some of the reasons that we also concluded, in addition to the acoustical evidence, that there was a probability of a conspiracy.

KOPPEL: Let's take a-

Mr. BELIN: Mr. Koppel-

KOPPEL: Mr. Belin, I'm afraid we're going to have to take a quick break and then-

Mr. BELIN: Well, there was just an inaccurate statement made by Congressman

Stokes-

KOPPEL: I understand-

Mr. BELIN: -that I'd like to correct after the break.

KOPPEL: And you will have an opportunity to correct that, or at least to give your rendition of it, when we come back. We'll continue our discussion in just a moment.

[Commercial break]

KOPPEL: Before we jump across the Atlantic to our very patient guest over there, Anthony Summers, David Belin was making the observation just before the break that something that Congressman Stokes said was inaccurate. So please, if you would, quickly tell me what you think that was.

Mr. BELIN: Well, with deference to the distinguished Congressman, there were several lawyers on the Warren Commission that spent months and months exploring foreign conspiracy. One of them was Professor- who is now Professor Slossen [sp?] of U.S.C. Law School. One was Professor Liebler [sp?], who was exploring domestic conspiracy. One was Judge Griffin [sp?], who is now a judge in Cleveland, Burt [sp?] Griffin, who was exploring the possibility of Jack Ruby conspiratorial involvement. Every conspiracy claim was explored. Now, the thing that upset me when I investigated the CIA was that the CIA had not leveled with the Warren Commission about the assassination plots, but indeed the Warren Commission did have the- did have much investigation of conspiracy. The majority of the House committee, from what the chief counsel told me, the critical element was the question of the acoustical evidence. And I believe that there's no doubt that the House committee did a very good job in determining where the source of the shots were because the House committee did find that Lee Harvey Oswald was indeed the lone gunman who did kill President Kennedy, who did kill Officer Tippett, and that indeed the bullet that struck President Kennedy's head came from behind, fired by Oswald, and the bullet that passed through President Kennedy's neck exited and struck Governor Connally. And I happen to have been the person that completely thwarted the FBI by finding the facts that led to the single bullet theory which proved that the bullet that went through-

KOPPEL: Mr. Belin, you make it difficult for me to come back to you because when I come back to you for a short answer, you end up giving me-

Mr. BELIN: I'm sorry.

KOPPEL: -a very, very long answer. Let me now at least show some courtesy to our guest on the other side of the Atlantic, Mr. Summers. You've been listening very patiently. The one conspiracy theory which we have not discussed in any detail on this broadcast, but which I think you feel is perhaps the one that deserves the most attention, is that in some respect the Mafia was involved. Is that correct?

ANTHONY SUMMERS, Journalist: Yes, and of course that's what the House committee thought in 1978. I think it's become clearer over the years that there are clues pointing in that direction. Just in the last week or so we've had Frank Ragano [sp?], who was for years the attorney to Teamsters union leader Jimmy Hoffa, saying that he was sent by Hoffa to discuss a plan to assassinate the

President with Santos Traficante. And Santos Traficante was one of the committee's prime suspects. I'd like to jump back just for a second to things that Mr. Belin has been saying there. It seems to me that he's extremely polemical about things and that this is perhaps not a moment in time to be polemical or to talk about litty-gritty little bits of detail about the case. I also note that he says that he is the only person who has seen everything at the CIA. That's an extraordinary statement. I've heard nobody else that claims that. If he has, then he's very much one up on everyone on the House committee. Chief counsel Blakey, who talked to me a good deal about this once his deliberations were finished, told me that there were some things that he had not seen, that the committee had not seen, and the two young attorneys who worked night after night, day after day, for nearly two years trying to deal with the CIA discovered that they were thwarted. And I think you had one of them on the air there at the beginning of the program saying they were thwarted at every step by the CIA, who were trying to sort of sit them out. And Chief Counsel Blakey also told me that there are some documents that the CIA will simply never, ever release. Now, the CIA's excuse when it says it won't release documents on the Kennedy assassination, and in particular on the vital Mexico City angle, is that this might betray their sources and methods. I think this is nonsense when we're talking about 1963, nearly 30 years ago, that sources- those that are still alive, and I'm thinking here of sources that the CIA may have had inside the Soviet or Cuban embassies in Mexico City, should of course be protected and that should be controlled. But the whole question of what CIA surveillance saw and whether the real Oswald went into those embassies in Mexico City or whether it was some sort of bogus Oswald, which is what many people on the committee thought, that should be examined and it should be examined with full cooperation from today's CIA.

KOPPEL: Mr. Belin, it is your contention, I believe, that you have seen those photographs, correct?

Mr. BELIN: Well, basically, I had a unique- and I'll try and keep this short.

KOPPEL: Yes, please, if you would.

Mr. BELIN: Yeah. I had the unique access to them because I was executive director of what was called the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States-

Mr. SUMMERS: Yes, but it's not unique. It-

Mr. BELIN: Well-

Mr. SUMMERS: It's been post-dated by the work of the Assassinations Committee, who spent many months studying this and who indeed produced a 375-page report on the matter, which is one of the things that we really do need to be released.

Mr. BELIN: If- if we can start with a point of agreement, I agree that all of that should be released. What I started to say was that I'm not the only person that has seen those documents because people in the CIA have seen them. I'm the only one who had access to the Warren Commission documents who also had the-

KOPPEL: Actually, Mr. Belin, if we could just reach a temporary agreement that you would address specifically the question that I asked, namely, did you see the photograph of a person purporting to be Lee Harvey Oswald entering the

Soviet embassy in Mexico City and were you personally able to identify that person as being Lee Harvey Oswald or could it have been someone else?

Mr. BELIN: I saw the photographs that were inside the CIA pertaining to who entered the embassy, yes.

KOPPEL: And?

Mr. BELIN: And I think that there is very important information that should be released. There was not any second Mr. Oswald that went to the embassy. There was a picture of someone that was at one time said to be Mr. Oswald, but it was just a mistake-

Mr. SUMMERS: Mr. Belin, I think you're out of date, sir.

Mr. BELIN: Well- well, if you will let me finish, if I can-

KOPPEL: Actually, all I'd like to- all I'd like to get from you for the moment, Mr. Belin, is did you identify that photograph as being a photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald?

Mr. BELIN: There was one photograph that I identified that was not a photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald, but there is other information that I identified that showed that indeed Oswald, Lee Harvey Oswald, was at the embassy.

KOPPEL: All right.

Mr. BELIN: And I think, as I have said since 1975-

Mr. SUMMERS: Well, the conclusion of the chief counsel of the-

Mr. BELIN: -that all the of information should have been released.

KOPPEL: Mr. Summers-

Mr. SUMMERS: May I comment here, Mr. Koppel?

KOPPEL: I'll tell you what. If we could just take a quick break, then when we come back I'll give you ample opportunity to respond to that point and we'll also get Congressman Stokes back in on the discussion. We'll be back in a moment.

[Commercial break]

KOPPEL: And back once again in London with Anthony Summers. A little compassion, Mr. Summers, for those of us who are not scholars on-

Mr. SUMMERS: Right.

KOPPEL: -the subject here. Explain what the-

Mr. SUMMERS: Yeah, I thought we were going-

KOPPEL: Explain, if you would, what the subject of disagreement is between you and Mr. Belin at the moment.

Mr. SUMMERS: Well, I thought we were getting bogged down there in who had seen what, when. I don't think that matters a damn. I think we ought to listen to Mr. Webster, who was director of the CIA and the FBI, who said recently the public has a right to know and a right to have access to all the information-

KOPPEL: Apparently no one on this broadcast tonight disagrees on that point.

Mr. SUMMERS: Right.

KOPPEL: I think everyone agrees-

Mr. SUMMERS: And I'd like to-

KOPPEL: Yeah, go ahead. I'm sorry.

Mr. SUMMERS: I'd like to quickly rattle through some things, some specific issues that really do need some digging into now on the basis of the documents and perhaps on further investigation. One, on the Mexico City thing, the situation as of all the work done by the House Assassinations Committee, which took everything much further forward, was that the chief counsel and his assistants came away with a 375-page report which has been suppressed for the time being. They were convinced that Oswald had indeed been in Mexico City, but they were uncertain that he was the Oswald who had been to the embassies. Now, the potential significance of that is that if someone else was going into the embassies and having contact with the Soviets and the Cubans, then there was some hanky-panky going on. Now, it's my view that Oswald may have been used right up to the assassination in some sort of psy-ops operation by the CIA or by U.S. intelligence to compromise the pro-Castro people in some way and that at the end, somebody who knew the way in which he was being used - innocently, if you like, up till then - then set him up as a patsy in the assassination. That's a thought. But we need to know precisely and all about the goings and comings at those two embassies- who took photographs of who, when. The House committee talked to five, I think, former CIA officers, all of- some of whom said they'd actually seen a photograph of Oswald at one of the embassies, some of whom said that they knew about such a photograph. That photograph has not been seen by the Warren Commission people, I think Mr. Belin would agree with me, and it hasn't been seen by anybody else. We need to know what those surveillance photographs showed. We need to know about the man called Maurice Bishop [sp?], who was seen by the leader of Alpha-66 - that's one of the main anti-Castro groups - with Oswald shortly before the assassination. Bessiana [sp?] thought - that's the leader of Alpha-66 - thought that this was his CIA officer and it's believed that this was a man called David Phillips [sp?], who went on to become the chief of western hemisphere of the CIA. At that time he was in charge of Cuban ops in Mexico City for the CIA and it was his disinformation operatives who produced most of the stories just after the assassination suggesting that Oswald was linked to the Castro Cubans. The notion here being, if one follows the conspiratorial notion, that perhaps Oswald was manipulated in such a way that the Cubans would be blamed for the assassination. And you have to remember - and I hope this isn't being too scholarly - that all this happened just a year after the Cuban missile crisis when the world went to the brink of nuclear war and Johnson, President Johnson, brought Chief Justice Warren in to run the Warren Commission on the grounds that it had to be done to avert nuclear war. And I think there may have been what I call a "benign cover-up" to push back the possibility of another confrontation with the

Soviet Union and Castro. He was effectively saying, "Look, the President's dead. It doesn't matter what our suspicions are. We've got to- we've just got to put the lid on the saucepan and"-

KOPPEL: Right. Let me, if I may, interrupt you now and go back to Congressman Stokes. Congressman, in addition to other evidence that has been cited on this broadcast now, you were telling me before the program of tapes that you and members of your committee had heard that I gather were what, FBI intercepts of conversations among various Mafioso?

Rep. STOKES: That is correct. We had assigned one member of our staff to just sit at the FBI headquarters and his assignment was to listen to the illegal wiretaps between members of organized crime that were held or contained in the FBI records. And there are some very interesting conversations that are transcribed, much of which has been reported in our written report, and which has been referred to so many times by Mr. Summers, who has obviously read our report and has accurately reflected on it here this evening. We concluded that organized crime as an entity - that is, the national commission - was not involved in the assassination. However, we could not preclude the possibility that individuals and members of organized crime were involved and we specifically cited Jimmy Hoffa, Carlos Marcello and Santos Traficante as being three individuals-

KOPPEL: Let me stop you on that point, because I'd like you to sort of finish that off for us and round that out when we come back, but we have to take a quick break. We'll continue our discussion in a moment.

[Commercial break]

KOPPEL: Congressman Stokes, just before the break you were saying that the focus of your investigation drew you to conclude that it was possible that at least three underworld crime figures might have been involved in the assassination of Jack Kennedy. Would you summarize that for us quickly?

Rep. STOKES: Yeah. We found, in effect, that Santos Traficante, Carlos Marcello and Jimmy Hoffa had the means, motive and the opportunity to have participated in the assassination of the President. We had no direct evidence, but the circumstantial evidence around our investigation concluded that they possibly had participation in the assassination.

KOPPEL: And when you talk about circumstantial evidence, are you also talking about some of those tape intercepts?

Rep. STOKES: Yes, we are.

KOPPEL: Which indicate what?

Rep. STOKES: And along with other witnesses whom we talked with and other individuals who provided information to our committee.

KOPPEL: Mr. Summers?

Mr. SUMMERS: I want to jump in here a second, if I may, to complement what the Congressman's saying. There are some very troubling things about the way the FBI has handled this. The alleged statement by Traficante to a Cuban exile friend

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of his, which was reported to the FBI back in 1962, that "the President is going to be hit," was reported, we gathered, by ~~Ertel~~ [sp?] to Director Hoover at the FBI, but not passed on to the Secret Service. So far as we can gather, unlike the average comment of a drunk in a bar saying "We're going to get the President," which happens three or four times a week and is always, and we know from the records, always reported to Secret Service, that was not. One needs to know why. There are a lot of very odd things like that about the FBI performance, not least - and I could- this goes just in 30 seconds here - that Oswald delivered a note to FBI headquarters in Dallas two or three weeks before the assassination, at the beginning of November. After the assassination and after Oswald had been shot, this was destroyed by the FBI and the agent who destroyed it said he did so - this is in testimony in the 70's, most people don't know about it - said he was told by the special agent in charge to tear the note up and throw it down the toilet, which he duly did. Now, we're dealing with the bureau on which the Warren Commission depended for all its evidence and it could do things like that with a key piece of evidence like a note to the FBI from the alleged assassin. There's a great deal of work to do yet.

KOPPEL: All right. Mr. Belin, we have about a minute, 15, a minute, 30 left. If you could focus a little bit on the allegations that have just been made in the last couple of minutes having to do with those three underworld figures?

Mr. BELIN: Well, first of all, it's absolutely false to say that the Warren Commission relied completely on the FBI. We did our independent investigation using witnesses that we found, using witnesses that the FBI interviewed and the Dallas police interviewed. The fact is-

Mr. SUMMERS: Essentially, you depended on the FBI.

Mr. BELIN: No, you know, I really- really- you know, I think I'm entitled to take a minute without interruption, sir.

KOPPEL: You've got 45 seconds left, Mr. Belin, then the program's over.

Mr. BELIN: And basically what I have called for since 1975 is a complete release of all of these files. I think it would add a tremendous benefit so far as confidence and trust in government. I know, having seen the files, that they will not change the conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman. They should be released and when and if I have some adequate time on national television, which I've never had, to really set forth the case of the Warren Commission - you know, we've never had that chance in the last 25 years more than five or ten minutes at a time - I think the public would be entitled to know and should know the mass of evidence that's already available before you say what is not available, but I think everything ought to be made available and I think that-

Mr. SUMMERS: Can I-

Mr. BELIN: -Congressman Stokes-

Mr. SUMMERS: Can I throw in a final thought, Mr. Koppel?

Mr. BELIN: -is to be complimented.

KOPPEL: I'm- I'm-

Mr. BELIN: I think that Congressman Stokes is to be complimented because he's joined to have the House Select Committee on Assassinations files released-

KOPPEL: Gentlemen, we are out of time. In fact, we are over our time, but let me just take these additional seconds to thank Mr. Belin, Mr. Summers, Congressman Stokes. Good of all of you to join us. I'll be back in a moment with a program note.

[Commercial break]

KOPPEL: Tomorrow on PrimeTime Live, a report on homeless veterans of Desert Storm. I'm Ted Koppel in Washington. Good night.